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of Dr. Gray's work, to which is added something of Dr. Watson's work, to which we have now added the results of Dr. Robinson's studies.

With such a history, stretching back as it does through more than half a century, it is not to be wondered at that the work is conservative to a marked degree. The sequence of families can differ little from that adopted nearly sixty years ago, and in this fascicle the citation of authorities, the matter of nomenclature, etc., have been made to conform as far as possible to the treatment accorded them seventeen years ago. This extreme conservatism is to be regretted, since science is more productive just as its followers are least tied by the traditions of the past. Yet, with all its conservatism, the Synoptical Flora will be invaluable, and every systematic botanist will hope that health and strength may not fail the present editor before his task is completed.

—CHARLES E. BESSEY.

The Natural History of Plants.¹—About seven years ago the eminent professor of botany in the University of Vienna, gave to the botanical world a book under the title *Pflanzenleben*, with which botanists soon became familiar as a most useful work. Some time ago the welcome announcement was made that the work was to be translated and brought out simultaneously in England and America. This has now been accomplished, and the result is before us in four good sized volumes, each called a "half-volume," which are attractive externally and internally. On comparing the translation, as brought out by Messrs Holt & Co., with the original, it must be conceded that the former is the by far better done, both in the clearness of text and the perfection with which the printer has brought out the illustrations. The colored plates are especially well done, being printed from the originals by the Bibliographische Institut of Leipzig.

For those who have not seen the original, it may be well to say that it presents in a readable manner (in a *popular* manner, we might say, if the word had not been so dreadfully abused) the main facts as to the structure, biology, and physiology of plants. It is not a text book for daily conning by the student, but it is rather a most interesting work to

¹ *The Natural History of Plants*, their forms, growth, reproduction and distribution, from the German of Anton Kerner von Marilaun, Professor of Botany in the University of Vienna, by F. W. Oliver, M. A., D. Sc. Quain Professor of Botany in University College, London, with the assistance of Marian Busk, B. Sc., and Mary F. Ewart, B. Sc. With about 1000 original woodcut illustrations and 16 plates in colors. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2 vols., large 8vo. pp. 777 and 983.

be read by not only the botanist, but by every intelligent man and woman who would know something of the deeper problems with which modern botany concerns itself. The topics noted in the table of contents will give some idea of the scope of the work as follows: The study of plants in ancient and modern times; The living principle in plants; Absorption of nutriment; Conduction of food; Formation of organic matter from the absorbed inorganic food; Metabolism and transport of materials; Growth and construction of plants; Plant forms as completed structures; The genesis of plant offspring; The history of species.

A single quotation taken from the opening chapter may serve to show the delightful style in which the work is written: "Some years ago, I rambled over the mountain district of north Italy in the lovely month of May. In a small sequestered valley, the slopes of which were densely clad with mighty oaks and tall shrubs, I found the flora developed in all its beauty. There, in full bloom, was the laburnum and manna-bush, besides broom and sweet-brier, and countless smaller shrubs and grasses. From every bush came the song of the nightingale, and the whole glorious perfection of a southern spring morning filled me with delight. Speaking, as we rested, to my guide, an Italian peasant, I expressed the pleasure I experienced in this wealth of laburnum blossoms and chorus of nightingales. Imagine the rude shock to my feelings on his replying briefly that the reason why the laburnum was so luxuriant was that its foliage were poisonous, and goats did not eat it; and that though no doubt there were plenty of nightingales, there were scarcely any hares left. For him, and, I dare say, for thousands of others, this valley clothed with flowers was nothing more than a pasture ground, and nightingales were merely things to be shot.

"This little occurrence, however, seems to me characteristic of the way in which the great majority of people look upon the world of plants and animals. To their minds, animals are game, trees are timber and firewood, herbs are vegetables (in the limited sense), or, perhaps, medicine or provender for domestic animals, whilst flowers are pretty for decoration. Turn in what direction I would, in every county I travelled for botanical purposes, the questions asked by the inhabitants were always the same. Everywhere I had to explain whether the plants I sought and gathered were poisonous or not; whether they were efficacious as a cure for this or that illness, and by what signs the medicinal or otherwise useful plants were to be recognized and distinguished from the rest."—CHARLES E. BESSEY.